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In a North Chicago classroom filled with fifth-graders -- including children of U.S. military personnel -- Sen. Dick Durbin on Friday again pledged to secure federal funding for schools serving Great Lakes Naval Station.

"This is not a wealthy district," Durbin said during a roughly hourlong visit at Forrestal Elementary School. "How can we expect them to subsidize the education of over 1,000 military children? It's just not fair."

Durbin's remarks came about two weeks after President Bush vetoed a Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill containing more than \$7 million for North Chicago Unit District 187, which serves the Navy base.

School districts in Highland Park and Glenview would benefit from the impact aid, too, each receiving more than \$900,000 annually.

The funding is needed because, unlike civilian homes and businesses, the sprawling base doesn't create property taxes for the district. Without the impact aid, the federal government would give District 187 only about \$550,000 a year.

If that happens, some educators fear District 187 could shut down and its students forced to attend schools in Libertyville, Gurnee and other nearby towns.

Durbin had worked with fellow Democratic Sen. Barack Obama and U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, a Republican from Highland Park, to include the funding in the bill, which had bipartisan support in Congress.

Bush's Nov. 13 veto was disappointing but not a surprise, Durbin said. The senator said he'll ensure the school funding is included in the next version of the appropriations legislation, which he hopes will be on the president's desk by Christmas.

Kirk and Obama will work with him again, he said.

"We haven't given up," Durbin said. "It's important to these kids and it's important to this nation."

Obama is committed to helping Durbin obtain aid for the schools while working toward a more permanent solution for the affected districts, a spokeswoman said.

Kirk said the issue isn't an immediate crisis because Congress can keep funding at current levels with continuing resolutions. The best approach, Kirk said, is to negotiate a second draft of the appropriations bill with the White House.

District 187 officials on Friday expressed gratitude for the renewed show of support.